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BAUCUS, HARKIN APPLAUD CMS FINAL RULE FOR HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INCENTIVES

*Finance, HELP Chairmen advocated for today's CMS final rule allowing flexible approach
for hospitals, physicians to qualify for health information technology incentives*

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) today applauded a final rule released by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that will ensure patients receive higher-quality, more affordable health care while giving health providers more flexibility to take advantage of health information technology (HIT) incentives. In March, Baucus and Harkin led a group of Senators in sending a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius requesting more flexibility for providers, including rural hospitals and doctors, to qualify for this important funding.

“Today’s announcement will help health care providers across the country access the resources they need to bring cutting edge technology and state-of-the-art care to their patients,” said Baucus.

“Doctors should spend their time focusing on patients – not paperwork – which is why we included this funding to modernize health care technology in the Recovery Act. Health information technology is a critical tool for increasing efficiency, cutting costs and providing high-quality patient care, and I’ve worked hard to make sure this rule recognize the unique challenges rural hospitals and doctors can sometimes face. While I’ll continue to work to ensure rural hospitals are treated fairly, I’m pleased with the rule CMS set forth for distributing this important funding.”

“This news is nothing short of a breakthrough in strengthening health information technology in this country,” said Harkin. **“It draws on the best advancements across the full spectrum to improve Americans’ health, increase safety and reduce health care costs -- all of which are critical steps to improve the quality and efficiency of patient care. I am encouraged that the Secretary worked with us to allow physicians and hospitals to qualify for incentives as they make incremental investments in adoption and use of this technology and that the rule allows physicians working in hospital outpatient settings to qualify for the incentives.”**

Baucus and Harkin had been strong advocates of improvements made to the policy CMS announced today. In March, when CMS issued draft regulations for health care providers to qualify for the HIT funding, the Senators urged CMS to do more to ensure health care providers would be able to benefit from the incentives. Baucus and Harkin, along with 37 Senators wrote a [letter](#) to Secretary Sebelius urging her to provide a temporary deferral of some of the requirements doctors and hospitals would have to meet in the short term in order to participate in this program. This deferral would allow health care providers, including those in rural and frontier areas, to receive incentives to modernize their health information technology systems, thereby boosting participation in national HIT efforts in rural areas in the long term.

The policy CMS issued today – in the form of a final rule – outlines specific objectives that hospitals and eligible health care professionals must meet in order to receive incentive funds provided by the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act. Baucus and Harkin were leaders in creating these health information technology incentives and, together with their colleagues in Congress, passed the funding as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to help build a modern health information technology infrastructure that will help health care providers across the country provide better care to their patients.

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